



U.S. and Illinois
Environmental
Protection Agencies

Offices of Community Involvement
and Community Relations
Chicago and Springfield, Illinois

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EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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Fact Sheet #4

Ellsworth Industrial Park Re: Downers Grove Area Groundwater Investigation Downers-Grove, Illinois

Background

Illinois EPA collected more than 500 samples from private wells in unincorporated areas of Downers Grove beginning in July 2001 and ending in January 2002. Results of those tests revealed contamination in the area groundwater by industrial solvents used as degreasers and cleaners - trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE) - at levels greater than the federal Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL) established as safe levels for all users of **public drinking water supplies**.

Both Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA have been actively investigating since last fall the source of the contamination in the groundwater. Illinois EPA made door-to-door interviews and inspections of businesses located in or near the Ellsworth Industrial Park. Both Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA mailed requests for information to businesses that have used solvents for their processes, and U.S. EPA obtained access to private property in the industrial park.

Recently, during the Phase II investigation work, Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA completed installation of 42 monitoring wells for groundwater evaluation within the Ellsworth Industrial Park, collected approximately 150 soil samples and 80 groundwater samples.

What is the status of the investigation to find the source of the TCE and PCE contamination in the area groundwater (in and around Downers Grove)?

U.S. EPA and Illinois EPA have completed the source area investigation and have narrowed the scope of the investigation to a number of areas of contamination that are thought to contribute to the groundwater contamination. The focus of this second phase of the investigation has been primarily in and near the Ellsworth Industrial Park (see attached map). Information gathered during the investigation will be reviewed for enforcement purposes.

Illinois EPA has placed in the Public Information Repository (Downers Grove Public Library) a Parson's Engineering report, dated April 4, 2002, describing the results of the private well testing in the area and fact sheets about the investigation. U.S. EPA has placed a "Preliminary Groundwater Investigation Report" in the repository as well as a number of information items. U.S. EPA also expects to have a report on the Phase II source investigation work to place in the library by late August.

Will there be a public meeting to answer questions about the source area investigation?

Yes. Illinois EPA and U.S. EPA will host Public Availability Sessions, similar to those held last fall, on September 4th at the Downers Grove Village Hall at 801 Burlington Ave. Illinois EPA will mail a flyer to the site contact list in mid-August with details about the availability sessions.

Will there be any more testing of private wells in the area by either agency?

On July 17th, Illinois EPA performed sampling of 13 private wells in unincorporated Downers Grove that were previously tested. This limited sampling is to determine whether the contamination has changed in the past seven to eleven months

How is responsibility for sampling private wells shared between the Illinois EPA and the Illinois Department of Public Health?

Because Illinois EPA has characterized (to the extent that private wells are available in the downgradient path of the plume) the groundwater contamination in the Downers Grove study area, Illinois EPA plans no further routine testing of private wells (except for minimal follow-up sampling to examine how the plume is changing over time). Illinois EPA is now referring all requests for private well testing to DuPage County Health Department, Les Bant, 111 North County Farm Road in Wheaton, IL 60187, phone #630/682-7979, extension 7177. Mr. Bant's e-mail address is Lbant@DuPageHealth.org

There is a new protocol in place (April 12, 2002) for notification and actions by state agencies in response to groundwater contamination that may affect private water supplies, "Interagency Coordinating Committee on Groundwater Contamination, Response Strategic Plan" (available for review at the Downers Grove Public Library). This plan clearly defines individual agency roles and responsibilities in the event of contamination of private water wells. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Illinois EPA will jointly evaluate each contaminated community and non-community water supply, identify potentially impacted private wells, and identify an appropriate response that may include sampling in each area for Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs):

If the project is related to delineating the "rate and extent" of a groundwater contamination plume, the Illinois EPA will take a lead or co-leadership role with local health departments in obtaining access to sample private drinking water wells. Private wells may not be useful for determining the rate and extent of groundwater contamination due to lack of adequate geologic information about the wells. **If the project is related to assessing a threat to public health**, IDPH will be the lead agency and will meet with Illinois EPA and the local health department to develop a response plan.

Should I have my well tested for volatile organic compounds if it wasn't tested already?

Illinois EPA and IDPH will share resources and cooperate in areas of mutual interest and share information between agencies as it is received such that data can be used for multiple purposes.

Illinois EPA will be glad to share sampling results, in general, from a given area (i.e., test results from certain hundred-blocks on nearby streets, without giving any private homeowner's test result) to assist residents who are trying to make a decision about sampling or about connecting to a public water supply. Health-related questions in regards to existing levels of contamination in the area groundwater may be directed to Ken Runkle, IDPH, Environmental Health Div., 217/782-5830 or to the DuPage County Health Department.

Because TCE (or PCE) can evaporate into the air, I am concerned about my child playing or swimming in the pool. What can you tell me about the risk of that exposure – either by absorption through the skin or by inhalation?

Illinois EPA has posed this question to the Illinois Department of Public Health, which maintains that this exposure (through the skin or by inhalation) would be minimal in an outdoor setting at the current levels of contamination (at parts per billion). Volatilization of the TCE or PCE contamination happens very quickly when filling a pool and continues afterwards from vaporization at the water surface, which then mixes with surrounding air. Residents should feel free to discuss this further with IDPH or the DuPage County Health Department.

If U.S. EPA does find one or more businesses/parties that may have been responsible for the TCE/PCE contamination, what is the next step?

One of the first steps that U.S. EPA would pursue as lead in the enforcement process is to issue a formal notice to all Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) who may have contributed to the groundwater problem. The notice will either identify the immediate removal work that must be done (and ask that the PRPs perform the work) or request that the PRPs perform a Remedial Investigation/ Feasibility Study to fully define the nature and extent of the contamination and evaluate possible cleanup approaches. The PRPs must respond to the notice within a certain period of time. If the PRPs do not respond, U.S. EPA has the authority to spend money to do the necessary work. It can then seek to recover its costs from the PRPs.

Will residents be able to recover from responsible parties the money they spend on connecting to public water supplies?

The Illinois Attorney General's Office (IAGO) acts as the attorney for the State of Illinois. The IAGO would pursue cost recovery for money the **State of Illinois** spends to investigate the source of contamination, if viable parties exist. Since no responsible party has yet been named, it is too soon to know whether negotiations with that party or parties might lead to a settlement that would include such provisions as reimbursement to affected residents for connections to a public water supply. Private residents may be able to bring their own legal action to recover the cost of connecting to a public water supply.

Has the state of Illinois established procedures by which private well owners will be better and sooner informed of this sort of ground-water contamination in the future?

Yes. Two mechanisms are now in place to avoid future situations in which private well owners would be unaware of groundwater contamination that could affect their wells. Recent legislation (SB2072, drafted by Illinois EPA) provides for Illinois EPA's notification to IDPH regarding certain chemical contamination found during typical investigations, and then IDPH's informing (in coordination with the delegated county health department) the local owners of private, semi-private or non-community wells via a public notice. Additionally, a protocol is now in place (as explained in the fourth response, above) that was developed by the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Groundwater (ICCG) to specify the steps by which state and local units of government carry out notification to private well owners. This protocol is currently being used in the evaluation of cleanup sites in the state and in evaluating the potential need for regulatory reforms.

In addition to these two measures, updated database information about locations of private (those reported), semi-private and community supply wells, which is **available for the first time**, is being input to databases to be shared among the agencies that have authority with respect to groundwater. In the past year, Geographical Information Technology (GIS) software became available via the Internet so that agencies with certain confidentiality clearance may more effectively share information in this format. Not only will federal, state and local agencies have better information about the potential locations of drinking water wells, those agencies will have the capability to overlay additional information to better understand threats to groundwater. For example, Illinois EPA can now overlay certain types of cleanup sites (e.g., a leaking underground storage tank site) or permit user locations to evaluate the proximity to area water wells.

For more information, please contact:

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Other Fact Sheets by the Office of Community Relations, including Fact Sheets #1, #2 and #3 for this site, are available on the Illinois EPA web site www.epa.state.il.us